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SUBJECT: SE WILLIAMSON'S MEETING WITH OCHA

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Summary  
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¶1. (SBU) BEGIN SUMMARY. On August 14, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Chief, Mike McDonagh, briefed Special Envoy Williamson on the current state of affairs in Darfur and Abyei. Regarding Abyei, McDonagh noted progress with the pullout of the SPLM and SAF and the deployment of the JIU. McDonagh's take on Darfur was mixed, as he noted that while security incidents in the first 6 months of 2008 are higher than the last 12 months combined, the overall humanitarian situation in Darfur is under control with health and nutrition indicators remaining steady. END SUMMARY.

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Positive Marks for Abyei  
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¶2. (SBU) Overall, McDonagh felt that Abyei is on track with both sides withdrawing, a JIU in place, and an Administrator and Deputy Administrator named. Regarding the newly-created Administration, McDonagh noted it was a positive sign that Edward Lino was not appointed Abyei Administrator, echoing a sentiment heard earlier in the week from NGOs working in and around Abyei (septel). McDonagh noted that IDPs would most likely start returning to Abyei in December or January, once infrastructure is in place. Currently, "people are better off where they are", McDonagh said, stating that it will take some time for resettlement programs to be implemented as such programs tend to be complicated to arrange. McDonagh indicated that relief agencies are providing humanitarian assistance for the IDPs in Agok and overall, the humanitarian operations are going well. On the issue of rebuilding Abyei, McDonagh stressed the importance of holding the parties responsible for the destruction of Abyei accountable for its rebuilding. In terms of longer term planning for Abyei, McDonagh highlighted the importance of supporting programs at the local level that will facilitate community-building and ensure Missiriya populations have access when

they start to return to the area in November.

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#### Security Incidents on the Rise in Darfur

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13. (SBU) McDonagh highlighted security as a major concern in Darfur: "We have seen more security incidents in the first 6 months of this year than we saw in the last 12 months combined", McDonagh said. Additionally, inter Arab and inter-opposition group fighting has led to new displacements and secondary displacements resulting in 1,000 displacements a day in Darfur. Although expats are very exposed in Darfur, humanitarian aid workers continue to operate there under what McDonagh called an "acceptable level of violence," highlighting the fact that despite the fact security conditions are bad, insecurity is not so severe as to cause NGOs to pull out of Darfur completely. Expats are targets due to having lucrative assets not because they are expats, McDonagh said, highlighting the fact that only two expats have been killed to date in Darfur. One staff member was killed in a landmine accident, and the second from an allergic reaction to bee stings. Currently there are 1,000 expats and 16,000 national staff working in Darfur. In light of the contentious relationship that the international community has with the government, McDonagh noted that the high numbers of relief staff are a surprising fact. The fact humanitarian aid workers are still receiving visas for Sudan is something to note.

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#### Access Still a Problem

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14. (SBU) McDonagh stated that overall access within Darfur is still a problem, with the humanitarian community relying increasingly on air transport to travel throughout Darfur. He added this limited

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access has led to a decline in the quality of humanitarian programming, especially in the health and nutrition sectors where frequent and consistent oversight and monitoring of a program are critical to a program's success. "This is a massive operation" McDonagh said, "but inputs are decreasing due to lack of access". In spite of all the constraints, McDonagh noted that nutrition indicators are holding steady. "You are not going to find large pockets of malnutrition in Darfur" McDonagh said. He attributes this to the fact that populations still have the ability to move to areas where they can get help. Borders are open and people are able to cross. As such, in McDonagh's words, we are not seeing "Ethiopian scale deaths" in Darfur.

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#### Empty Bowls in Darfur

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15. (SBU) According to McDonagh, providing food assistance is the most troubling aspect of the humanitarian response in Darfur. "It is the most important thing we do", McDonagh said, stating that the current food situation is tenuous, but for the time being, under control. The Government of Sudan (GoS) needs to do more, McDonagh said, adding that between 2004 and 2008, the UN World Food Program (WFP) provided 2 million metric tons (MT) of food for Darfur, whereas the GoS contributed 20,000 MT of food and WFP paid the transport costs for the GoS food. Whereas the total humanitarian aid donation has totaled approximately 4 billion USD, the GoS donation is a mere 4 million USD, which is only one tenth of one percent of the total food aid given to the hungry people in Darfur.

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#### Decentralized Harassment

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16. (SBU) Despite some positive steps forward, the NGO community continues to encounter government-initiated stumbling blocks. McDonagh cited harassment of the NGOs as still being a huge problem in Darfur. There continues to be a troubling disconnect between the federal and state levels regarding rules and regulations for the

NGOs. Even though the General Directory of Procedures (GDP) is in place, state governments continue to create new requirements and put new restrictions in place for Darfur operations that are not addressed in the GDP. According to McDonagh, this problem is most evident in South Darfur. McDonagh attributes the increased harassment in South Darfur to Hassabo, the HAC Commissioner, who is from South Darfur. McDonagh characterized Hassabo as a troublemaker. This lack of government coordination leaves humanitarian organizations spending time on trying to meet HAC requirements instead of on program implementation.

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Comment  
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17. (SBU) Although the recent successes in Abyei should be cautiously lauded (and monitored closely,) the ongoing humanitarian situation in Darfur is troubling. According to McDonagh, the situation in the IDP camps in Darfur could not get much worse. Referring to the overall humanitarian situation in Darfur, McDonagh's sense was that the current status quo could continue forever. While the GOS has taken some positive steps, and the problems of banditry are more often than not linked to undisciplined rebel groups, the problems of access and security will continue to plague humanitarian relief efforts. The international community must continue to press the GOS on reducing bureaucratic impediments. However, as McDonagh noted, relief workers are able to get visas despite the delays, and there are currently 1000 INGO expatriate staff in Darfur. On the political front, every effort should be made to attempt to broker a new comprehensive ceasefire, which should include security guarantees for humanitarian access. The new Chief Mediator should

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engage as soon as possible in this process.

18. (U) SE Williamson did not clear this cable prior to his departure.

ASQUINO